

LARRY CROUSE



A REPORT ON THE 2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



Representative Larry Crouse

Dear Friends & Neighbors,

The 2004 legislative session has begun, and the business of the Legislature is in full swing. My hope is this year we can apply some of the same principles the Legislature followed in 2003. Last year, in the face of a \$2.7 billion budget deficit, we were able to pass a **balanced budget that held down spending while funding essential services**. This was no easy task and we did it in bipartisan fashion.

I believe this legislative session offers us great opportunities if we stay on the same **fiscally responsible path**. The first step is taking a very close look at our 2004 supplemental budget. We need to be sure we end this biennium with an operating budget that can be carried into the future **without tax increases or reductions in core state services**.

In this newsletter you will find information about issues important to moving our state forward. Every time I consider an issue as your legislator, I first think about how it impacts our district and jobs. We must do all we can to **retain and attract new employers**. As always, I welcome and encourage your feedback.

My job is to represent you, so please contact me if I can help. And if you are in the Olympia area over the next couple of months, please stop by my office to visit.

Sincerely,

Rep. Larry Crouse

KEEP UP WITH THE 2004 LEGISLATURE IN OLYMPIA

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HELPING SMALL BUSINESSES LIKE WE HELPED BOEING

When Boeing announced it would assemble its new 7E7 airplanes in Everett, it was good news for our state. It symbolized what can be accomplished when legislators reach across the aisle and work together.



However, I did not support the tax incentives Boeing received. I felt these tax breaks were too much for one employer and would prohibit meaningful reforms in the future for smaller employers. **Instead of giving Boeing such large tax breaks, I believe we should be supporting small employers and creating a business climate inviting to everyone.**

Unfortunately, our state's economy is still struggling. Employers in Washington — particularly smaller ones — face unfriendly tax, regulation, land use, permit, energy, and transportation issues. As a result, Washington is not employer-friendly and the unemployment rate is too high.

It's time we start focusing on small employers, who make up a majority of our workforce and are the lifeline of our state's economy. The Legislature needs to continue to work on **creating a business climate that fosters a growing economy by:**

- Making our regulatory environment less costly and less cumbersome.
- Having more accountability in our rule-making processes to give greater consideration to the concerns of citizens and effects of agency rules on employers.
- Renewing and extending tax incentives for high-tech research and development.

■ FIXING OUR UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SYSTEM

Washington has one of the highest unemployment insurance costs in the nation. Companies look at this when considering operating in our state. A compromise was reached that reformed our unemployment insurance system to better reflect layoff experience. The system is now in line with its original purpose — to help people who have become unemployed unexpectedly. It also **protects workers while still controlling costs for employers.**

■ BRINGING FAIRNESS TO WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Reforms were made to our workers' compensation program that **preserve medical benefits for injured workers, while saving up to \$200 million** over the next two years. These changes will reduce the number of hearing-loss claims being improperly charged to employers.

A FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE STATE BUDGET

To have a fiscally responsible 2004 supplemental budget, the Legislature should follow the same sound principles of 2003. Unfortunately, I have concerns with what our governor has proposed for the supplemental budget. It would result in substantially diminished reserves and an unsustainable budget that would be more than **\$1 billion in the red** again by next biennium. For us to take this path would be **irresponsible and risky.**

While some of the governor's ideas are worth considering, we need to make a concerted effort to **look for savings in the existing budget** to help offset any future expenditures. It's important we end this biennium with a budget that can be carried into the next biennium **without tax increases or reductions in core state services.**

RESCUING OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS

Civil litigation abuses and exposures to liability are drastically affecting the costs and risks for doctors and other health care providers. **Medical malpractice insurance premiums in our state are skyrocket-**

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ing out of control. As a result, doctors are having trouble maintaining and establishing services, particularly in rural areas.

Difficult times for health care providers mean **especially hard times for consumers.** More and more people either cannot get the health care when they need it, or are having their options limited. Something must be done soon to address this crisis and one solution is tort reform.

TORT REFORM

Washington consumers are disadvantaged by a tort system that is a lottery system for a select few. Unfortunately, those who are actually injured are not necessarily the ones who win.

To help truly protect the consumer, we need **long-overdue tort reform.** We must replace our current tort system with a more **equitable, fair and timely**



liability process. Other states have enacted tort reform with great success and it's time we follow their lead.

Below are a few ideas that will help **reduce the number of frivolous lawsuits** and put the "justice" back in our justice system.

- Joint and several liability reform
- Cap on non-economic damages
- Evidence of collateral sources of payment
- Binding arbitration of disputes
- Protect injury victims and consumers by tying money awards to actual fault
- Encouraging early dispute resolution to free up courts and reduce costs

PUBLIC SAFETY AND PREVENTING CRIME

■ PUNISHING AUTO THIEVES

Washington is fourth in the nation in auto thefts. Only Arizona, Washington, D.C., and Nevada have more cars stolen. This is a trend we must combat.

A car is often a family's second most important investment next to a home. It's a lifeline for transporting kids and going to work. When a car is stolen, it's a devastating and costly experience. **Society also pays for car thefts through higher insurance rates.**

Under current law, juveniles, who commit over half of all the auto thefts, still don't receive a day in detention until their fifth conviction. Adults who steal cars and can't be proven part of an organized "chop shop" don't go to prison until their seventh conviction. This is unacceptable and we need to be sure car thieves – no matter what age – face **real consequences** for their crimes.

EYEING ENERGY

As Ranking Republican on the Technology, Telecommunications and Energy Committee, energy is an especially important issue to me. Our state's ability to generate energy continues to concern many of us. With our continued reliance on hydropower, Washington is just one dry winter away from facing an energy crisis similar to 2001.

We need to do all we can do to **encourage new energy production** in our state. A package of agency rules was proposed in October 2003 that would set new standards for placing large energy plants. I'll be watching this closely to see how it evolves and will let you know if any standards-related legislation is proposed in 2004.



IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

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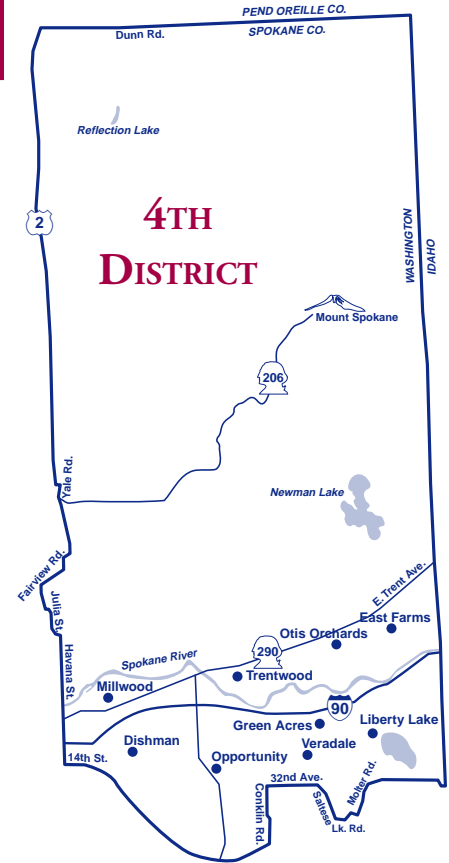
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